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# homemakers' chat

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U. S. DEPARTMENT  
OF AGRICULTURE

Monday, March 2, 1942

Subject: "Vitamins in Wartime." Information from nutrition specialists of the U. S. Department of Agriculture.

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You've heard a lot about vitamins. Everybody has. But perhaps you never heard of vitamins as weapons of war. That's a recent idea even for military experts. It's only lately that they have come to realize how the vitamins in soldiers' rations may affect the success of an army, even the outcome of a war. Of course, all the great generals in history have understood that food for the army was about as important as ammunition. But the generals of the past didn't understand how many different foods an army needs to make it most efficient. And they didn't know that minute chemical substances in food, called vitamins, may decide how straight a soldier shoots ... how easily he tires ... how steady his nerves are ... how fast his wounds heal ... and even how well civilian morale holds up back home.

Let's look at the vitamins A,B,C,D and see why each is important in war. Let's start at the beginning of the alphabet with vitamin A. Here's a story told at the National Nutrition Conference about a big trucking company carrying defense materials. This company cut down its night accidents by the simple device of giving all its driver-crews bags of fresh raw carrots at the beginning of every trip. Somebody had told the manager of the company about the effect of vitamin A on the eyesight, and he took the hint. Another story, told at the same Conference, was about a young British gunner in the RAF. In the early months of the war he made an extraordinary record nailing Nazi aircraft in darkness. His mates called him "Carrots" because he was continually munching raw carrots. His mates didn't know the carrots contained vitamin A, and they didn't know the effect



of vitamin A on the eyesight. But they saw the results in the young gunner's record. Today airmen and anti-aircraft gunners have a special diet extra rich in vitamin A. That diet contains other vitamin-A foods besides carrots, of course. It contains plenty of yellow and green vegetables, and eggs, butter, cream, fish, liver and meat liver -- all foods that happen to be rich in A.

Our own Government is reserving a large supply of vitamin A concentrate for our air force. Aviators on flight can't carry quantities of eggs, butter, cream, and green and yellow vegetables, of course, but they can keep a supply of concentrated vitamin A in their pockets to keep their eyes in condition. Vitamin A, you know, is the vitamin that helps eyes adjust quickly from bright light to darkness.

Airmen aren't the only people who need vitamin A in wartime. The British have learned that civilians also need plenty of foods rich in this vitamin to help them see better in blackouts and avoid accidents. Vitamin A is necessary for the general good health of soldiers and civilians. It's one of the vitamins that helps build up body health to resist infections, especially infections of the nose, throat and lungs.

Now for a look at the second vitamin in the alphabet -- B, called the vitamin B complex because it's made up of a number of different vitamins. Right now the one of the group you hear most about is vitamin B-one. The chemists call it thiamin. And newspaper men have nicknamed it the "morale vitamin." The British have found it helpful to the morale of people under the stress and strain of war -- in bombing attacks and so on.

In Britain they now have a law requiring this vitamin to be added to all white flour. Here in the United States our "enriched" flour and bread also contains this B-one or thiamin. People who run low on vitamin B-one often become nervous and afraid, unhappy, irritable and hard to get along with, forgetful,





inefficient and unable to concentrate on a job. Nutrition scientists point out that the difference between a hero and a coward, or an ambitious man and a lazy-bones, or a crosspatch and a calm and cheerful soul may go back to the vitamins in his food.

Many doctors today are giving patients vitamin B-one for different mental and emotional troubles. And many people, who appear to be neurotics or mental cases, recover rapidly after taking the vitamin B-one they lacked. Doctors even say enough of this vitamin might mean fewer cases of so-called "shell shock" in wartime.....Well, the foods especially rich in B-one are the seeds--nuts (or peanut butter), whole grain foods, beans and peas-- and also milk, eggs and meat, especially pork. Many Americans run short on B because they eat too much white flour, not enriched; and too much refined sugar; and refined fats and oils.

Now let's go on to the third vitamin--C, the one so plentiful in citrus fruit, tomatoes, cabbage and most foods just out of the garden. Vitamin C aids general good health and is one of the vitamins that helps the body resist infections like "trench mouth" which soldiers suffered from in the last war. But vitamin C is of special value in wartime because it helps wounds heal quickly. Soldiers on rations lacking vitamin C are slow to recover from wounds. They also tire more easily than men who get their full quota of this vitamin every day.

As for vitamin D--the sunlight or "cod-liver oil vitamin", that comes into the war picture rather indirectly. Growing children need vitamin D much more than adults, for this vitamin helps in the building of bones and teeth. Nutrition scientists believe that many of the young men rejected by the army for poor teeth, flat feet, and malformed bones have these defects because they went short on sunshine or fish-liver oil when they were babies and children--or because their mothers lacked vitamin D before they were born.

Well, there are a few glimpses of vitamins A,B,C,D in wartime. Perhaps they'll give you an idea of why you and your family as well as the boys in uniform need a diet that supplies all the vitamins that make for good health.

